UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1941
24 July 1995

MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Security Council expresses grave concern at deteriorating situation in Bihac; demands respect for status of Bosnian safe areas and safety of UNPROFOR personnel, following deaths of two French peace-keepers in Sarajevo.

* Security Council condemns acts of violence in Middle East after bus bombing in Israel; expresses full support for peace process.

* Special Rapporteur says evidence suggests Pale authorities are personally and directly responsible for massive human rights abuses in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

* Secretary-General recommends UNIFIL mandate be extended for six months, citing continued tension in southern Lebanon; says Force can be streamlined without affecting its operational capacity.

* United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks begins final session; Canada says draft treaty must not be weakened.

* * *

The Security Council today expressed grave concern at the deteriorating situation in and around Bihac. In a statement to correspondents, Council President Gerardo Martinez Blanco (Honduras) demanded that all parties cease hostile acts and respect the status of the Bosnian safe areas. He recalled earlier Council resolutions on the safe areas, including Bihac, particularly resolutions 836 (1993) and 959 (1994).

The Council demanded that all parties respect the safety and freedom of movement of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and its personnel. It expressed condolences to the French Government and to the families concerned following the deaths of two French peace-keepers in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the weekend.

The two French soldiers were killed in separate incidents in Sarajevo. One, a medical officer, died when Bosnian Serb forces fired five mortar rounds

(more)

For information media—not an official record

at UNPROFOR's Zetra camp. The other soldier was killed when the Bosnian Serbs opened fire on an UNPROFOR convoy near the airport.

In a related development, elements of the Rapid Reaction Force have been deployed on Mount Igman to deter attacks on United Nations personnel and convoys. Some 300 British troops with 12 artillery pieces have taken up position on the mountain, and will be able to observe areas from which the Bosnian Serbs have launched attacks in the past. Meanwhile, 540 French peace-keepers with 12 light tanks have been deployed in the area.

* * *

In a second statement issued in connection with today's bus bombing in Israel, the Council condemned all acts of violence and called on the parties in the Middle East to avoid acts of terrorism. It called on the Palestinians to cooperate with the peace plan and expressed its full support for the Middle East peace process.

* * *

The de facto Bosnian Serb authorities are very close to attaining their apparent aim of achieving "ethnic purity" in territory under their control, according to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. In a report on the human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia, he said non-Serbs had been subjected to unrelenting terrorization and discrimination. As a result, virtually none of them wished to remain in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Bosnian Serb authorities seemed to have slowed down the last stages of the exodus, he continued. Among their motives might be a wish to retain some non-Serbs for forced labour, and to have people for inclusion in negotiated population exchanges. While there were criminal gangs operating in the Banja Luka area, much evidence suggested that the authorities were personally and directly responsible for the massive human rights abuses which had taken place.

The Special Rapporteur called on the Bosnian Serb authorities to cease immediately all practices of "ethnic cleansing", to provide adequate protection to all groups subjected to discrimination and to facilitate the restitution of property. Those responsible for crimes must be brought to justice, and conditions created for the safe return of all displaced persons and refugees.

* * *

The Security Council should extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for six months to 31 January 1996, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a report dated 19 July, he said the situation in southern Lebanon remained tense and volatile, citing the continuation of the Israeli occupation and attacks by groups opposed to it.

(more)

While there had been no progress towards the implementation of UNIFIL's mandate, the Force contributed to stability in the area and to the protection of its inhabitants.

The Secretary-General said he intended to reduce UNIFIL's overall strength by 10 per cent by the spring of 1996. The Force Commander's headquarters staff would be cut by 20 per cent. Engineer support would be consolidated and the infantry battalions would be reduced slightly. Such streamlining would lead to savings of $10 million per year without affecting the Force's operational capacity. He noted that unpaid assessments to the UNIFIL Special Account currently amounted to $211 million.

* * *

The final session of the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks aimed at preventing international conflicts over fishing on the high seas began today at Headquarters. The two-week Conference is expect to conclude a global treaty which would legally bind countries to conserve and sustainably manage fish stocks and settle disputes peacefully.

The Conference has before it a 48-article draft text, based on negotiations which began in July 1993. It includes general principles to guide coastal and distant-water-fishing States in fulfilling their conservation and management duties under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Those duties include measures to eliminate overfishing and ensure long-term sustainability of fish stocks.

In an address to the Conference, Canada's Minister for Fisheries and Oceans, Brian Tobin, stressed the need for a legally-binding treaty with compulsory dispute settlement to protect threatened resources. Failure to control the massive fishing power deployed on the high seas would lead to destructive overfishing, depleted resources, human misery and conflict among States. Canada would strenuously oppose any weakening of the draft text, he added.

* *** *